IN-LINE SKATE HAVING ONE PIECE CHASSIS AND WHEEL SPACERS

BACKGROUND

1. Field of the Invention

This invention is directed to chassis for skates, in general, and to a chassis stamped and formed from a single piece of metal for in-line roller skates, in particular.

2. Prior Art

Roller skates and ice skates have been known for many years.

A recent innovation in roller skates is referred to as in-line skates wherein the wheels or rollers are arranged in-line one behind the other, typically, in groups of four. This arrangement creates a type of footwear which is more akin to an ice skate, than to a conventional roller skate. As a result, roller hockey has become a popular hobby, pastime and even professional sports activity.

The typical in-line skate includes a shoe or boot and an attached metal chassis for supporting the rollers. In the past, the metal chassis has been formed by machining a single block of metal to form the desired shape. Alternatively, the frame has been constructed by welding multiple pieces of metal together to form the frame. Of course, these chassis and methods of manufacture have been quite expensive wherein the skates become expensive.

SUMMARY OF THE INSTANT INVENTION

This invention is directed to a skate chassis including sole and heel flanges, which is formed of a single piece of material, typically metal blank stock, which is operated upon in a multiple step, stamping process. This process can include a progressive die technique. The blank stock is pierced, punched, formed, coined, and folded in various steps until a one piece chassis is produced.

Spacers for supporting axles and spacing wheels on the axles are integrally formed in the chassis during the coining (or extruding) operation.

Optional welding steps can be utilized in order to establish connections between strength imparting braces formed in the chassis.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIGS. **1** and 1A are perspective views of a skate chassis produced in accordance with the instant invention.

FIG. **2** is a side elevation view of a skate chassis produced in accordance with the instant invention.

FIG. **3** is a front end elevation view of a skate chassis produced in accordance with the instant invention.

FIG. **4** is a back end elevation view of a skate chassis produced in accordance with the instant invention.

FIG. **5** is a detail view of the coined or extruded spacer provided in a skate chassis produced in accordance with the instant invention.

FIGS. *6a–6c* plan views of a representative formation of a skate chassis from a single piece of metal blank stock.

DESCRIPTION OF A PREFERRED EMBODIMENT

Referring now to FIG. **1**, there is shown a perspective view of a skate chassis **100** produced in accordance with the instant invention. In particular, the skate chassis is preferrably designed for the so-called "in-line" skate which supports a plurality of skate wheels (W, seen in FIG **2**.) which are aligned behind each other in a single line.

The chassis **100** comprises a pair of spaced apart, substantially parallel sides **101** and **102**. The sides are integrally formed with a bottom **103**. A front or sole mounting flange **104** and a rear or heel mounting flange **105** is integrally formed with side **101**. Complementary mounting flanges **106** and **107** are integrally formed with side **102**. The complementary flanges extend outwardly from the respective sides.

One or more support braces **110** and **111** can be integrally formed with the respective sides **101** and **102**. Similar braces **113** and **114** are formed at the rear of the chassis. In a preferred embodiment, the support braces can be welded together at a joint **112**. Braces **113** and **114** can be welded, as well, as described hereinafter.

A plurality of axle spacers **115** are formed on the inner surface of each of the sides **101** and **102**, respectively. The axle support holes **120** are formed, at least to some degree, axially through the spacers **115**. Thus, the number of spacers **115** is dictated by the number of axles to be supported in the chassis **100**.

Typically, the spacers **115** are extruded from the side material. (This process is sometimes referred to as coining.) The technique of forming the spacers **115** integrally with the sides of the chassis avoids the multi-part, multi-step process used in the prior art wherein separate spacers are inserted into the axle support holes **120** in the chassis.

The chassis **100** includes a plurality of apertures or holes **130** and **131** in the sole and heal mounting flanges **104, 106** and **105, 107**, respectively, for receiving fasteners (e.g. rivets, bolts or the like) used to mount a shoe or a boot B to the chassis **100**. Embossments **150** and **151** can be included in the chassis for cosmetic and/or strengthening purposes.

Referring now to FIG. **2**, there is shown a side elevation view of a skate chassis **100** produced in accordance with the instant invention. In this view, the side **102** is depicted. (Side **101**, seen in FIG. **1**, is similarity configured.) The rear of the skate chassis is shown on the right in FIG. **2**. The heel support flange **107** is integrally formed at the top rear edge of side **102**. The sole support flange **106** is integrally formed at the top, front edge of side **102**.

The support brace **111** is integrally formed at the top, middle edge of side **102**. A complementary support brace **110** is formed with side **101** as shown in FIG. **1**. It is contemplated that support brace **110** or **111** can be appropriately dimensioned to fully extend between sides **101** and **102**. However, in the preferred embodiment, support braces **110** and **111** are about equal in dimensions and are welded together in joint **112** at the ends thereof about midway between sides **101** and **102**.

The support brace **113** is integrally formed at the top, back edge of side **102**. A complementary support brace **114** is formed with side **101** as shown in FIG. **1**. It is contemplated that support brace **114** or **113** can be appropriately dimensioned to fully extend between sides **101** and **102**. However, in the preferred embodiment, support braces **114** and **113** are about equal in dimensions and are welded together in joint **177** at the ends thereof about midway between sides **101** and **102**.

Embossments **150, 151** and **152** are shown in FIG. **2**. The number, placement and configuration of these embossments can be varied as desired. One or more of the embossments may be omitted, if desired. The embossments are intended to provide strengthening (as well as esthetic) characteristics to the chassis **100** but the specific design is not critical.

The apertures **130** and **131** are provided through the flanges **106** and **107**, respectively. Appropriate fasteners, such as rivets, screws or the like (not shown), are passed through these apertures to fasten a shoe or boot (B) to the chassis **100**.

In addition, one or more gussets **141** are formed between flange **106** and side **102**. Similarly, gussets **142** are formed between flange **107** and side **102**. The gussets are used in order to provide additional strength for the chassis. Of course, similar gussets are provided on the other side of the chassis as well.

The spacers **115** ace formed in the side **102** by extruding or coining, as noted supra. The spacers are, in effect, small truncated conically shaped projections which extend inwardly toward the center of the chassis and are located on the opposite surface of side **102**. The apertures **120** are axially formed in the spacers **115** and are adapted to receive the wheel supports or axles in the assembly of the skate.

Referring now to FIG. **3**, there is shown a back end elevation view of the chassis **100**. In this case, the back end is consistent with the right end of the chassis **100** as shown in FIG. **1**.

The view in FIG. **3** shows the sides spaced apart but integrally formed with bottom **103**. The support braces **110** and **111** are integrally formed with sides **101** and **102**, respectively. The braces **110** and **111** are bent toward each other and, preferrably, joined together in a welded joint **112**.

The rear flanges **105** and **107**, as well as the front flanges **104** and **106**, are formed integrally with sides **101** and **102**, respectively. The flanges are bent outwardly relative to the sides in this embodiment.

In this embodiment, the upper ends **101A** and **102A** of sides **101** and **102**, respectively, are bent inwardly toward each other to form an "A-frame" style chassis. Support brackets **113** and **114** are joined together at a welded joint **177**. The upper ends of the sides are bent together as shown in FIG. **3** to provide one style of frame.

The spacers **115** extend inwardly relative to the sides **101** and **102**. The spacers assist in the proper spacing of the skate wheels when they are assembled with the chassis.

Referring now to FIG. **4**, there is shown a back end elevation view of another embodiment of the chassis **100**. In this case, the back end is consistent with the right end of the chassis **100** as shown in FIG. **2**.

The view in FIG. **4** shows the sides **101** and **102** spaced apart but integrally formed with bottom **103**. The support braces **110** and **111** are integrally formed with sides **101** and **102**, respectively. The braces **110** and **111** are bent toward each other and, preferrably, joined together in a welded joint **112**.

The rear flanges **105** and **107**, as well as the front flanges **104** and **106**, are formed integrally with sides **101** and **102**, respectively. The flanges are bent outwardly relative to the sides in the preferred embodiment.

In this embodiment, the sides **101** and **102**, respectively, are substantially parallel to each other and for the "square-frame" style chassis. Support brackets **113** and **114** are joined together at a welded joint shown at **177** in FIG. **3** and at **178** in FIG. **4**. This style of frame and the A-frame style shown in FIG. **3** are two examples of frame configuration. Other configurations are also contemplated even though not specifically shown and/or described herein.

The spacers **115** extend inwardly relative to the sides **101** and **102**. The spacers assist in the proper spacing of the skate wheels when they are assembled with the chassis.

Referring now to FIG. **5**, there is shown a detailed view of a spacer **115**. As described supra, each spacer **115** is extruded or coined in the side **101** or **102** as appropriate. In particular, the spacer **115** takes a generally truncated conical configuration of material on the inner surface of the relative side. The spacer **115** defined to include a flat, annular surface **503** and central axial aperture **120** which has the appropriate diameter to engage and/or interact with the axle **501**, which supports the skate wheel when the skate is assembled. Typically, the spacer is, effectively, countersunk on the exterior of the respective chassis side. The countersunk configuration can be advantageously used to accommodate a flat head screw **502** (and/or axle **501**) in order to provide a smooth exterior surface for the assembled skate. Of course, carriage bolts or screws with other head configurations can be used, if desired.

Referring now to FIG. **6**, there is shown a representative process for forming the one piece skate chassis **100**. In this embodiment, the input material or blank is in the form of rolls or sheets of metal, i.e. aluminum, stainless steel, or the like, about 10 to 12 inches wide and about ⅛" thick.

The blank stock **600** is fed into the stamping and forming apparatus (not shown) where it is stamped, cut and formed. The process can take several discrete steps and/or it can be accomplished by use of a progressive die. Typically, in the first step, i.e. Step 1, the general outline of the chassis is formed. Also a plurality of relatively small holes **130**, **131** are punched through the blank **601**. These holes become the mounting holes for receiving the rivets or other fasteners for securing a boot or a shoe to the completed frame as described above.

Likewise, several (typically eight) axle holes **200**, arranged in pairs, are punched through the blank. These holes are used to receive the axles for the wheels of the assembled skate.

Also, several large holes **175** or cutouts are punched through the blank **601** adjacent to and intermediate related pairs of axle holes **200**. The holes or cutouts **175** are used to form the openings through which the wheels of the assembled skate protrude, with the remaining material shown at **103**.

Some or all of the cuts and stampings can be accomplished concurrently. That is, the various stamping procedures can be accomplished in one or several steps depending upon the type of stamping equipment utilized. For example, the shape of the front and back ends of the sides **101** and **102** can be formed at Step 1.

In another step such as Step 2, embossments **150** can be made in the blank **602** adjacent to the axle holes **200**. These areas of the blank will become the sides **101** and **102** of the assembled frame. These embossments can take any shape or configuration desired. The embossments are, generally, intended to provide strengthening characteristics by including ribs, grooves, ridges or the like. The shapes of the embossments can be circular, rectilinear, elongated ribs or the like to form a desired configuration and can provide design advantages.

In addition, at a convenient time in the process, for example during Step 2, the axle holes **200** are extruded, coined or otherwise formed into short, truncated cylinders or cones **115** which extend from the surface of the blank. These cones or cylinders will ultimately be disposed within the formed chassis and provide integrally formed spacers for locating the wheels within the assembled skate.

Once the desired shape has been stamped and/or punched into the blank, the forming of the chassis **100** is initiated.